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In Search of Susanna

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and solidity" of past values and rural life provided escape from the pressure of modern life for many readers (90, 37). Petersen graphically contextualizes Aldrich's success and business acumen: in 1919, her income from writing was \$1,575 at a time when bread cost ten cents a loaf (33); in 1935, at a peak of popularity, the \$2,000 per week Aldrich commanded for screenplay writing contrasted with the \$27 per month a farm laborer earned (129).

Beginning in 1917, Aldrich actively marketed her fiction to the film industry, which she believed would ensure her financial security. Aldrich was not successful, however, until 1941, with the production of *Cheers for Miss Bishop*, based on the 1933 novel about a midwestern woman who devotes herself to teaching for fifty years. As with other of her short stories and novels that provided an alternative view of life from the actual contemporary situation of war or upheaval, the film won acclaim as a "tender and touching piece of Americana" (181).

Unfortunately, Petersen does not offer rigorous literary criticism of Aldrich's writings, discussion of how the body of her work fits with popular romance or magazine writing, or much historical context apart from brief economic examples. In making the case for Aldrich's historically based fiction, Petersen cites only two historians of women's experience, but not Glenda Riley, whose *Frontierswomen: The Iowa Experience* treats experiences similar to those in Aldrich's fiction. In her initial discussion of Aldrich's literary identity, Petersen indicates that she will explore the romance and realism of her writing. She does so only through plot summaries or observations about the origin of a character. However, one could reasonably expect from reading the biography that Aldrich may have both followed conventional formulas for magazine writing and broken with them in her rigorous historical research for her novels and in her resistance to stereotypical depictions of rural or small-town life and people. At its best, Petersen's biography portrays a woman in touch with her family roots and traditional midwestern values, reflective of both the craft of writing and the business of publication, and ambitious for an audience that shared her sense of pioneer and basic human values.

In Search of Susanna, by Suzanne L. Bunkers. *Singular Lives: The Iowa Series in Autobiography*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996. xiv, 251 pp. Illustrations, maps. \$19.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY LINDA S. PICKLE, WESTMINSTER COLLEGE, MISSOURI

The tracing of family roots is always, to some degree, the attempt at a fuller understanding of the self. Suzanne Bunkers engages in a much

broadier and more self-conscious tracing of her ancestry than one usually associates with genealogical study in order to learn more about herself. The Susanna of the title, a great-great-grandmother whose story sparks Bunkers's investigation, is also the Suzanne who authored this work.

Bunkers imbeds her personal history of growing up in Iowa into that of Luxembourg-Americans in the Midwest. Her book offers an overview of that history and of the European roots and traditions of this immigrant group. But this is not a historical study of immigrant life. Bunkers's methodology is much more that of the memoir writer. She documents the process of her search for the "truth" about her ancestor, Susanna Simmerl, and at the same time weaves details of her own life and those of members of her immediate and extended family into her narrative. Her search takes her to her family's place of origin in Europe and to family and related documents spanning the past century. In her research and self-exploration, Bunkers discovers patterns of similarity among the generations and connections between herself and those whose lives have touched her and her family within her own lifetime and in earlier times. In particular, through her own complex experiences as an unmarried mother, she comes finally to accept Susanna Simmerl's having left her illegitimate child in Luxembourg.

Historical and sociological analysis always are secondary to Bunkers's interest in exploring the personal and subjective dimensions of her material. This may disappoint some who might seek a more dispassionate treatment of the immigrant group with which Bunkers identifies herself. Others may be made uncomfortable, on the other hand, by the sometimes blunt quality of her self-revelation. As she puts it, she found it necessary to examine "the knots, tangles, and imperfect stitches" on the back side of her family tapestry, as well as "the orderly beauty on its face" (48). This reader found some of the lengthy citations from journal entries tedious. But the purposes for which Bunkers cites from her own diaries and letters are interesting: to gain a greater immediacy of experience and to test memory against testimony of the moment remembered.

In my view, Bunkers's work is most valuable as an exercise in autobiographical theory and practice. Her methodology and her insights are informed by the writings and thoughts of others, both theorists and practitioners of autobiography. Citations from their works are woven into her text and do much to enlighten and enrich her attempt to reveal the complete reality of experience and to discover its significance. Bunkers derives insights into her life and that of her ancestor from other places along her journey of self-exploration. She draws on a variety of cultural sources and finds the spots at which

they are knotted together in her textual weaving: her Catholic upbringing and childhood devotion to Mary the mother of Christ, contemporary social treatment of single mothers, and her reading of *The Scarlet Letter*, for example. Bunkers the teacher of literature and autobiography is evident in her work; her students are fortunate to work with someone as adept and firmly based in the genre as she.

In Search of Susanna also has merit as a multigenerational weaving of women's lives and experiences. Bunkers's self-awareness is that of a contemporary American feminist. But her process of self-discovery leads her beyond what might have been a narrow view of her material. It enables her, finally, through her exploration of Susanna Simmerl's life, to accept the reality and the validity of other women's views and actions, both in the past and, by implication, in the future. Bunkers's earnestness and honesty compel her to show us, with all its warts and complexities, the self who creates the self, and who is altered in the process of self-creation.

The Lincoln Highway, volume 1, *Iowa*, by Gregory M. Franzwa. Tucson: Patrice Press, 1995. xi, 185 pp. Maps, photographs, index. \$34.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY LEO LANDIS, HENRY FORD MUSEUM & GREENFIELD VILLAGE

Iowans did not immediately embrace the automobile. The combination of vehicle cost, resistance to new technology, and poor highways deterred most Americans from automobile use. In response to the inferior quality of Iowa roads, newspaper editors, state officials, and private citizens promoted improved highways for automobile transportation. Gregory Franzwa, a writer with a lifetime interest in transportation history, examines the development of the Lincoln Highway in Iowa and compiles a guide for this historic roadway. Franzwa, who hopes to complete a twelve-volume series on the Lincoln Highway in America, chronicles the east-to-west progress of the highway across the state. Through the narrative, photographs, and illustrations, Franzwa creates a portrait of Old Highway 30 as it was at its creation and is today.

Franzwa's technique is engaging and interesting. The work is devoted entirely to the Lincoln Highway and serves as a useful field guide to the meandering, and now disappearing, historic road. The Lincoln Highway passed through Clinton, Cedar, Linn, Benton, Tama, Marshall, Story, Boone, Greene, Carroll, Crawford, Harrison, and Pottawattamie Counties. The county-by-county examination is a sensible, if formulaic technique. Contemporary and historic accounts of Lincoln Highway history provide context and color in the work.

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